

TIRED HORSE WELL AND TROUGH

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OR-025-04-04

Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Three Rivers Resource Area of the Burns District is proposing to implement a water improvement project in the West Wagontire Allotment (map attached).

A. Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of the Tired Horse Well and Trough project is to provide a reliable water source and improve livestock distribution in the Tired Horse Butte Pasture. The project was identified as one needed to implement the West Wagontire Allotment Management Plan.

The only water sources on public land in this pasture are two lakebed waterholes that have water in them on an intermittent basis and one water trough. It is proposed to use this 15,000-acre pasture during the winter. The waterholes would generally be frozen at this time of year.

The well and trough are needed to provide a permanent source of water for livestock during an early spring or winter use period.

B. Conformance with Land Use Plans, Laws, Regulation and Policy

This action is in conformance with the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP) (1992).

CHAPTER II: ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to drill a stock well and supply electricity with a remote control propane generator in T. 25 S., R. 23 E., Section 7, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$. The well pad would be leveled for the drilling rig as well as the trough. The disturbed area would measure approximately 100 feet in diameter. A 16-foot bottomless trough would be installed adjacent to the well.

B. Alternative A - No Action

No improvements would be made at this site.

CHAPTER III: DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The following critical elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be impacted by the proposed action or the alternatives: Threatened or Endangered Plant or Animal Species, Floodplains, Air Quality, Prime or Unique Farmlands, Wild and Scenic Rivers, American Indian Religious Concerns, Paleontological Resources, Hazardous Materials, Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Migratory Birds, Adverse Energy Impacts, or Environmental Justice concerns. Noncritical elements of the human environment that are not present or impacted by the proposed action include: Special Status Species, Fish, Water Resources, Recreation and Minerals.

A. Wildlife

Wildlife species in these areas include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, deer mouse, Brewer's sparrow, western fence lizard, and numerous other species common to the sagebrush steppe of southeastern Oregon.

Sage-grouse habitat occurs within 2 miles of the project site, but no specific seasonal habitat has been identified. No other Special Status species are known to exist in this area.

B. Vegetation

The vegetation consists primarily of shrub species such as Wyoming big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, and low sagebrush. Grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass, squirreltail, Idaho fescue, Thurber's needlegrass, cheatgrass, and Sandberg's bluegrass.

There are no known sites of Special Status plants in the vicinity of these projects. There has been little inventory done in these areas and there is moderate potential for Special Status plants to occur in these project areas. Special Status plant survey was conducted at the proposed well location and no Special Status species were identified.

C. Soils

The soils are generally shallow and rocky on the hills and ridges with shallow to moderately deep loams on the slopes and drainage bottoms.

D. Cultural Paleontological Resources

A cultural resource survey was completed by District Archaeological Technician/Range Management Specialist Bill Andersen in summer 2003. No archaeological or paleontological resources were found in the area of effect. Additionally, the area of effect is not known to be used for American Indian Traditional Practices.

E. Range

The Tired Horse Well and Trough is located in the Tired Horse Butte Pasture of the West Wagontire Allotment. Livestock use has typically occurred in May and June in this pasture. This pasture is in good range condition and mid to late seral stage ecological status. Continued use during this time period may cause resource conditions to deteriorate. A shift to winter use is needed to maintain range condition and ecological status.

F. Weeds

There have been no official weed inventories in the vicinity of this proposed project.

CHAPTER IV: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following impacts would result from implementation of the proposed action or any of the alternatives.

A. Wildlife

Proposed Action: Disturbance of wildlife during construction would take place and some short duration displacement is expected. Reliable water would be made available in the Tired Horse Butte Pasture where currently few reliable water sources exist. Sage-grouse and other birds have been known to drown in water troughs and bird ramps would need to be firmly secured in the trough.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no impacts to the area's wildlife.

B. Vegetation

Proposed Action: Vegetation would be completely removed from the trough location due to leveling and installation as well as trampling from livestock. Increased utilization on the surrounding vegetation would occur near the new water location.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no direct or indirect impacts to the vegetation at this site, but heavy use around the other sites would continue to be disproportionately heavy.

C. Soils

Proposed Action: Soils would become compacted around the trough site over time.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no impacts to the soil resource.

D. Cultural /Paleontological Resources

Proposed Action: Archaeological resources exist in the vicinity of the Tired Horse Lake playas. Grazing the area during the winter and placing a new water source away from the playas may result in lower levels of livestock congregation and trampling in the playa areas. This could diminish further impacts to sites there.

Alternative A - No Action: Continued use of the playa lakes in the Tired Horse Lake area as the sole water source for livestock in the area could result in continued trampling and wallowing impacts from livestock congregating near the playa waterholes and on the playa edges.

E. Range

Proposed Action: Livestock distribution would improve and utilization levels would decrease at the limited existing water sources. The winter use treatment would cause vegetative conditions to improve across the pasture.

Alternative A - No Action: Livestock distribution would not improve and heavy utilization levels would continue at the two existing water sites.

F. Weeds

Rams Butte Site:

If there are infestations of noxious weeds in the vicinity of the proposed well and trough, the disturbance of installing the trough and the increased disturbance at the trough location from cattle impacts could lead to increasing weed problems.

CHAPTER V: MITIGATING MEASURES

All equipment used for the project should be cleaned prior to transport to the site and upon completion of the project.

Perform construction activities between July 15 and May 1 to reduce disturbance to nesting birds and install escape ramps to water troughs to prevent birds from drowning.

CHAPTER VI: CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Proposed Action: In considering the proposed action with those activities that have previously occurred at or in the vicinity of the project site or those activities that may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future, no cumulative effects were identified or anticipated.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no cumulative impacts associated with this alternative.

CHAPTER VI: CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Participating Staff

Bill Andersen, Range Management Specialist
Lindsey Aschim, Watershed Specialist
Jim Buchanan, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
Gary Foulkes, Environmental Planner
Terri Geisler, Geologist
Fred McDonald, Natural Resource Specialist
Skip Renschler, Realty Specialist
Fred Taylor, Wildlife Biologist
Nora Taylor, Botanist
Scott Thomas, District Archaeologist

B. Persons, Groups, and Agencies that will be or have been Consulted

Clayton King
Larry Maxwell, Maxwell Cattle Co.